

FOREWORD



In the first Martian Manhunter Archives volume, reprinting the first three years of “John Jones Manhunter from Mars” back-up stories from DETECTIVE COMICS, we saw the beginning of the character’s evolution from a plainclothes detective with a gimmick to a Martian super-hero. Our second volume, reprinting the next three years’ worth of stories (minus one month) from DETECTIVE COMICS #261-295 (1958-61), completes that evolutionary process.

In the first dozen stories in this volume, he still works in secret, having to turn invisible when he assumes his true Martian form and uses his super-powers—a carry-over from those early stories when it was Detective John Jones who captured the bad guys and we rarely saw the Martian J’Onn J’Onzz—but then comes “The Unmasking of John Jones” from DETECTIVE COMICS #273. Earth is visited by a second Martian, B’Rett, who has all of our hero’s powers. But unlike the Martian Manhunter, who fights crime, B’Rett is himself a criminal, who wants nothing less than to become Master of Earth. To give him an edge over our hero, he also has an arsenal of Martian weapons, including a ray gun (of course) and a pellet of Formula Z6, which will rob a Martian of his super-powers

if he turns invisible. When J’Onn is doused with the formula, he must turn visible to fight B’Rett, forcing him to reveal his existence to the people of Earth. Ironically (and here I must inert a SPOILER WARNING), J’Onn is able to use his greatest weakness to defeat his foe. As a fellow Martian, B’Rett is also vulnerable to fire. J’Onn takes the weakened B’Rett and the ship that brought him to Earth to a nearby missile base, so that the ship, with B’Rett on board, can be launched into space and returned to Mars. J’Onn, who in previous stories has wanted nothing more than to return to his homeworld (see, for example, this volume’s story from DETECTIVE COMICS #267, “John Jones’ Farewell to Earth”) chooses, for reasons not given, to remain on Earth.

J’Onn had always kept his true identity secret because he thought Earthmen would fear his alien Martian appearance. After all, the first Earthman he met, Prof. Mark Erdel, whose teleportation device had brought J’Onn to Earth, was so startled by the Martian’s sudden appearance that he died of a heart attack. (And since it was only Erdel who could operate his invention, J’Onn was unable to return to Mars.) But fortunately, when the Martian Manhunter’s existence is

finally revealed, he is welcomed by every law-abiding Earthling as a hero. Earth's criminals feel differently, of course.

By exposing himself and B'Rett to fire, J'Onn also reveals his weakness to the Earthmen who are present, but later stories, including the one in the very next issue, claim that J'Onn keeps his weakness a secret from Earthmen so that criminals can't use it against him. In "The Human Flame" (DETECTIVE COMICS #274) a criminal named Mike (no last name given) has heard rumors that the Martian Manhunter's weakness is fire. He dons an armored suit with built-in flame-throwers—hence the name, the Human Flame—and attacks an armored bank truck, hoping this will get the Martian Manhunter's attention. It does, of course—nothing escapes Martian vision—and the battle ensues. But J'Onn can't get close to the Human Flame without revealing his weakness. This time I won't spoil the ending for you, except to say that somehow our hero both defeats his foe and keeps his secret, so that Mike the Human Flame is left not knowing for certain if fire is indeed the Martian Manhunter's weakness.

In DETECTIVE COMICS #285 more Martians invade Earth—Martian mandrills! A Martian rocket-ship was supposed to transport the mandrills from their home in the jungles of Mars to a zoo on one of Mars' moons, but the ship goes off-course and crash-lands on Earth. Fortunately, the mandrills share the same vulnerability to fire as everything else that lives on Mars, and so...

*** SPOILER WARNING ***

...J'Onn instructs Captain Harding and his men to surround the mandrills and then to each light up a cigarette. (Yes, in a scenario you would think only a tobacco lobbyist would be brazen enough to concoct, cigarettes save the Earth!) Harding and his

men don't understand why the mandrills have suddenly become weak, even though they had previously witnessed the same thing happen to the Martian criminal B'Rett when he had been exposed to fire, and had even heard J'Onn explain afterwards that fire was the weakness of all Martians. At any rate, the weakened mandrills are put back on board their rocket-ship, which is taken to a familiar nearby missile base and launched into space, to return to Mars. Once again, J'Onn remains on Earth, this time suggesting that he may someday return to Mars when his work here on Earth is done.

Two issues later, in "J'Onn J'Onzz's Kid Brother", our hero is given yet another opportunity to return home. We find Detective John Jones in "a disguised laboratory on the other side of the city", where he keeps Prof. Erdel's teleportation device, the robot-brain. (Interesting that even though he's alone in his secret laboratory, he assumes the human guise of John Jones rather than of Martian J'Onn J'Onzz.) He's finally figured out how the thing works, and is about to transport himself back to Mars, but he trips and accidentally pushes a certain button instead of pulling it out. Instead of returning J'Onn to Mars, the robot-brain summons another Martian to Earth: J'Onn's kid brother, T'Omm J'Onzz. The ever-quirky robot-brain won't allow both brothers to return to Mars together. The machine can only be used once more to transport either T'Omm or J'Onn. T'Omm wants to remain on Earth with his older brother, but J'Onn insists that T'Omm return home. But when J'Onn tries to activate the robot-brain one last time, nothing happens. As J'Onn explains, with a Martian's sophisticated understanding of advanced technology, "The robot-brain has conked out completely!" I assume I'm not spoiling things

if I reveal that J'Onn learns why the robot-brain conked out and is able to return T'Omm to Mars. And it also shouldn't surprise you that on Mars, as on Earth, it's not unusual for little brothers to make life difficult for big brothers. But any further details would require another spoiler warning, which I will spare you.

If we didn't know better, we might begin to think that maybe J'Onn doesn't really want to return to Mars. Even on those rare occasions when some "accident" or "coincidence" something else suspiciously resembling self-sabotage prevents him from returning home, he makes some remark about remaining until "my work here on Earth is done" or, as he watches yet another rocket blast off to Mars, simply says nothing at all. Not that there aren't reasons why he would want to remain on Earth. Maybe he likes being a super-hero. Maybe he likes Earthlings. Maybe there's one Earthling in particular he likes.

We were introduced to Diane Meade in the previous Martian Manhunter Archives volume, in the story, "John Jones' Female Nemesis" from DETECTIVE COMICS #246. Meade, the police commissioner's daughter, has passed her probationary police-woman's test, and for her one day probationary period she is assigned to work with Det. John Jones. This is back in the plainclothes-detective-with-a-gimmick days, when it is John Jones, not J'Onn J'Onzz, who catches the bad guys by using his powers in secret. Our hero likes his privacy; the last thing he needs is a partner. The problems begin as soon as they've left the precinct building, when Diane lights up a cigarette. It's one thing to use tobacco smoke to defeat Martian mandrills, but this simply will not do. Fortunately, with his Martian memory, John knows the police regulations

manual by heart, so he can cite paragraph 363 B, which forbids probationary officers from smoking. But despite the rocky start, John comes to learn that having a partner might not be so bad, especially one as smart and as capable, and as pretty, as Diane Meade. If you've read the story, you know how they solve their case, a museum robbery, how they escape from the museum's reconstructed prehistoric cave, and so on. If you haven't read it, then all I can say is that if you like Vol. 2, you'll love Vol. 1. What's really interesting about the story is that our Martian hero is attracted to this Earth woman. The story ends with John Jones at home, gazing into his bathroom mirror. "Her eyes sparkle when she looks at me," he says. "Even if she does create a dreadful dilemma, I must admit it's fun having her along on a case!" Then he transforms into, J'Onn J'Onzz, Martian. "Yet—would her eyes sparkle if she saw me in my natural guise—like this?" He sighs. "A Martian on Earth can lead an awfully lonely existence!"

Things get less lonely when his battle with B'Rett forces him to reveal his true self to the world, and he's accepted as a hero—and less lonely still when, in DETECTIVE COMICS #275, Diane Meade, her probationary period ended, has become a full-fledged uniformed police officer and is assigned to John Jones' precinct. Since they worked so well together on their first case, she is permanently assigned to him as a partner—"John Jones' Pesky Partner", as the story title puts it. Why "pesky"? Because anyone as smart as her will probably figure out that John Jones, detective, and J'Onn J'Onzz, Martian Manhunter, are one and the same. Fortunately, Diane is no Lois Lane. She does have her suspicions at first, but when John finds a way to cover up his secret, she drops

the subject. She doesn't have to make it her life's work to expose his dual identity. And our hero is no Clark Kent. Instead of feeling threatened by Diane's inquisitiveness, John is even more attracted to her because of her intelligence and curiosity.

It's the affectionate and sympathetic portrayal of Diane Mead, and J'Onn's obvious affection for her, that make the stories about their relationship the most enjoyable parts of this book. Even after her return, DETECTIVE COMICS editor Jack Schiff and his writers were reluctant to use her in every story. Fortunately, as we'll see in Vol. 3, this will change. But in this volume we have only four more Diane Meade stories (from issues #282, 284, 290 and 293). We don't need to go into a detailed synopsis of each one. What matters is that she becomes more likable with each appearances, and we begin to understand why J'Onn's homesickness for Mars, such an important theme in the early stories, receives so little attention—often none at all—in these later stories. We know little about the life he had on Mars. We are told in the debut story, "The Strange Experient of Dr. Erdel" (DETECTIVE COMICS #225), that he worked as a scientist. (We're not told what branch of science.) In this volume's aforementioned "J'Onn J'Onzz's Kid Brother" we're introduced to his parents and younger sibling. But that's it. Did he have a wife or a girlfriend? Did he ever find love on Mars? We don't know, but we do know that he found it on Earth.

— Wade Greenberg

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from the musical based on the '70s cult movie, Major Jones and the Spiders from Mars.